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MODERN PUNCTUATION: ITS UTILITIES AND CONVENTIONS, by George Summey, Jr. New York, Oxford University Press, American Branch, 1919.

The ordinary manual of punctuation, of the sort that issues in a steady stream from the press either separately or annexed to textbooks on English composition, has nothing to do with scholarship. It is a mechanical copy of traditional rules, many of which are practically obsolete, many others entirely too arbitrary and sweeping to fit the facts. Extremely rare is even the effort to find and present fundamental principles. The hopeless practise of taking up each mark separately, of lumping together the period that closes the sentence with the period that denotes the abbreviation, the dash for parenthetic matter, for anacolouthon, and for omitted letters in a word, and of carefully separating the use of comma, semi-colon, and colon to perform the same function in a compound sentence, reveals the prevalent point of view. And yet the subject of our modern English system of punctuation, especially on its historic and comparative sides, is full of fascinating problems that call for scholarly investigation, most of them untouched. No one has thought it worth while, for example, to examine how the elocutionary system of punctuation, based wholly on pauses, of the ancients and the Elizabethans passed over into a system based mainly on logical and grammatical structure; or why the German language has entirely disregarded in its punctuation the distinction between restrictive and non-restrictive elements, whereas modern English has steadily broadened its application and is today insisting more and more strictly upon its observance; or why in our own day the colon, the curves, and the exclamation point have waned while the comma and the dash have waxed. Punctuation is a parergon of the written language, but one inextricably intertwined with its every aspect, from orthography and grammar to rhetoric and style, and one capable of betraying many of its secrets. Perhaps just because of the unaccountable neglect by scientific students of the whole subject, a neglect that has permitted mere custom to rule almost unhampered by reflective self-consciousness or any effective "schoolmastering," it may yet be found to lead, more directly than some of the well-trodden paths of approach, to a knowledge of the innate tendencies and the genuine individuality of our language.

The treatise on *Modern Punctuation* by Dr. Summey is therefore a most welcome innovation among recent manuals on its subject. Its treatment is fresh and original, discriminately up-to-date without being unreasonably radical, and thruout, altho it does not attempt any historical or comparative investigation, scholarly in its attitude. Especially refreshing is the

thoro way in which it lays the ghost-rules which, like the "ghost-words" of earlier dictionaries, are so dear to the hearts of the writers of the textbooks. That clauses in common dependence must be separated by semi-colons, that semi-colons must be used between members of a compound sentence whenever any of them contain commas, that a comma must be placed between a long subject, or one ending in a finite verb, and its predicate, that all quotations, save only short phrases, must invariably be preceded by a comma or other mark, and must begin with a capital, that the ellipsis of the verb must always be marked by a comma,—all these are summarily disposed of. With regard to the last-mentioned hoary dictum Dr. Summey says justly, "As a rule, a comma standing for an omitted verb will defeat the very purpose of the omission." In rejecting another highly exaggerated rule which is a universal favorite of the textbooks, namely that transposed elements require to be set off by commas, Dr. Summey is perhaps too sweeping when he says, "If so-called transposed elements are pointed, the decisive reason is not transposition," and his examples are unfortunately selected. When he declares (p. 89) that in "A man bold enough to try it may succeed" and "A stone rolling down a mountain gathers no moss," the elements "bold enough to try it" and "rolling down a mountain" are unpointed altho transposed, one wonders just what would be his idea of the normal position of these phrases. His main contention, that transposed like normally placed modifiers need pointing only when non-restrictive, is certainly valid; but he should add that they permit it even when restrictive. The rule of transposition is in fact not quite dead. It has entirely lost its binding sanction, but may still be cited in defence. When Max Beerbohm writes, "An exquisite talent like Whistler's, whether in painting or in writing, is always at its best on a small scale. On a large scale it strays and is distressed," he is not at liberty to put a comma before the normally placed restrictive phrase "on a small scale," but surely he might have done so after the equally restrictive "On a large scale," just because it is transposed. But we can only be grateful to Dr. Summey for the thoro refurbishing he has given not only to the ancient rules but to their traditional illustrations. In the method which he describes as proving dead rules by dead specimens, the student is too often confronted with such sentences as these: "Philosophers assert, that Nature is unlimited in her operations; that she has inexhaustible treasures in reserve; and that knowledge will always be progressive;" or "He was courteous, not cringing, to superiors; affable, but not familiar, to equals; and kind, but not condescending, to inferiors." Of the latter Dr. Summey declares, "Such a sentence ought to be cited only by way of warning."

Equally independent in judgment, and often admirable in expression, are some of the other numerous criticisms on previous treatises. "Those who frame prohibitions with regard to punctuation apparently assume that there is nothing between debauchery and total abstinence." "Blanket rules are misleading." "The term afterthought is a makeshift. It does not mean a thing forgotten till the last second, but an expression of parenthetical character placed at the end of the sentence." There is a decided improvement over previous definitions when the purpose of employing punctuation marks is thus stated at the beginning of the volume: "to show at a glance the relation, the relative weights, or the nature of the words they set off," altho here I should like to add, "or of their junctions." As should long ago have been done, Dr. Summey includes under punctuation the use of capitals, of italics, and also of paragraphing. Some of his most original pages are those that show the relation between the movement and structure of the paragraph as a whole and the punctuation within it,—a highly promising field, which might be extended to poetry by studying the effect of the line and stanza units on the punctuation of verse. Likewise to be recommended is Dr. Summey's treatment of many particular disputed questions. There has been no clearer or more sensible presentation of the much vexed case of the series with one conjunction (the "men, women, and children" vs. "men, women and children" controversy), or of the puzzle presented when an adverbial group follows a conjunction at the beginning of a phrase or clause, or of the much muddled situation where 'namely' or related words are used before an example or list. All these are discussed with admirable freedom from either hidebound traditionalism or dogmatic radicalism. Nor must mention be omitted of the plan and arrangement of the book as a whole. The order of the chapters is by the different occasions for punctuation and not by the different points used,—that is, by reason and not by rote.

A close reading of the book suggests a few criticisms, most of them of distinctly minor importance. In a manual of punctuation we should surely not find a sentence punctuated as follows (p. 43): "These [illustrations] are given in manuals of punctuation without warning, as examples of good punctuation."—From the list of authorities detailed in the Introduction is omitted the *Queen's English* of Dean Alford, referred to more than once in the pages that follow; and likewise Fowler's *King's English*, incomplete but admirably independent in judgment and helpful in illustration.—Dr. Summey's choice of terminology in general is decidedly good, and some of his innovations, such as "quotes" for quotation marks and "curves" for marks of parenthesis, are distinct improvements; but the terms "editorial points" for the quotes, brackets, and ellipsis dots,

and of "etymological points" for the apostrophe, the abbreviation period, the hyphens, and the ellipsis dash—even tho the latter has been used before—are hardly convincing. Would not "orthographical" be a better substitute in this connection?—On p. 112 we read that "subordinate or independent parenthetical clauses with or without conjunction may be set off by commas, dashes, or curves." But is it ever permissible to set off merely by commas a genuinely independent clause without conjunction? When Max Beerbohm says, for instance, "In one of his books (I do not remember which, though they too, I suppose, are all numbered) Mr. Andrew Lang tells a story that has always delighted and always will delight me," he might have reduced the curves to dashes, but no further; and certainly commas are excluded when the parenthesis calls for a question or an exclamation mark. The treatment of the restrictive or non-restrictive distinction is not, I think, quite up to the level of the other sections of the book, altho far in advance of the usual perfunctory handling given to this fundamental and increasingly important principle of modern English punctuation. The doubtful thesis that clearly non-restrictive groups are sometimes properly left unpunctuated is supported by illustrations that seem badly chosen. The first sentence (p. 87), "Which has proved wiser, as we look back, Johnson who ridiculed Gray's poetry, or Boswell who sat up all night reading it?" can hardly be cited as containing "clearly non-restrictive" relative clauses. Manifestly the writer does not mean that the unrestricted Boswell has proved wiser than the absolute Johnson; he is merely appealing from Philip drunk to a lesser Philip sober. On another page (p. 114) we read of "a sort of restrictive parenthesis,"—surely a contradiction in terms. Quite rightly Dr. Summey has extended the restrictive principle far beyond the usual narrow limitation to the relative clause and has applied it to all sorts of modifiers. In one case perhaps he might have extended it still further. In distinguishing between alternative and appositional *or*, he explains, of course correctly that appositional *or*, connecting two names for the same thing, usually requires the comma, but he remarks that this is not always the case: one should say "a quotation, or citation" unless one means to suggest that the terms stand for different things, but Mrs. Atherton may speak of "the heroic or goddess type of woman" without the comma, because, says Dr. Summey, "it is clear that only one type of woman is meant." Is not the restrictive or non-restrictive distinction a better criterion here? Naturally the addition of a synonym is usually non-restrictive, but when it is added for the purpose of defining or limiting the idea expressed by the first word it is felt as restrictive, and hence properly left unpointed.

But the feature of the book which to the present reviewer seems least satisfactory is Dr. Summey's denial of any distinction between grammatical and rhetorical punctuation. When he labors at considerable length to disprove the validity of John Wilson's familiar division, and more than once recurs to the argument later in his manual, his customary lucidity apparently abandons him, and much that he urges seems quite beside the point. He even finds in the distinction highly destructive consequences for both the arts upon which it is based, when he says, "If it be held that a point is grammatical without being rhetorical, it is necessary to divorce grammar from thought and to make rhetoric include only the unusual or highly emphatic." To which it need only be replied that two things may be perfectly distinct without being mutually exclusive. Like morality and religion, grammar and rhetoric are inextricably intertwined in practise; but when either one of them tries to monopolize the domain of the other there are apt to be dangerous consequences. The old distinction, that grammar deals with things right or wrong, on the principle of correctness, and rhetoric with the better or worse, on the principle of adaptation, is still perfectly legitimate and has a useful application in the field of punctuation. It is perhaps true that no punctuation marks should be called purely grammatical or purely rhetorical; but the grammatical uses, which can be regulated, may helpfully be kept separate from the rhetorical uses, which can merely be illustrated. Especially does the teacher find, by bitter experience, that he must first of all instill the minimum that is obligatory before he can successfully inculcate the maximum that is desirable. Confronted so often by punctuation that is patently ungrammatical, he must teach the student who writes "Milton composed many poems in his youth. The best known being *Lycidas* and *Comus*" that he is committing as heinous a solecism as when he doubles the negative or dangles the participle. Quite properly he may add that there are some writers who will commit the solecism on purpose, as Kipling does for the sake of flippancy when he writes, "That letter made Agnes Leiter very unhappy, and she cried and put it away in her desk, and became Mrs. Somebody Else for the good of her family. Which is the first duty of every Christian maid"; but one of the uses of grammar is to furnish flippant writers with solecisms to commit. Of course the principle of adaptation guided by taste and feeling may suggest the avoidance of many things that grammar could not denounce as incorrect, and may even sanction bad grammar for a purpose; but the thousand shades of emotion or nuances of thought aimed at thru rhetorical pointing, so many of which are suggestively exemplified in Dr. Summey's pages, are one and all variations—nearly always exaggerations—of the normal

grammatical punctuation. Rhetoric may over-ride grammar at its pleasure, but its effects are conditioned by the grammar it over-rides, or else it merely postures in a vacuum.

Dissent tho we may from the position that Dr. Summey has taken at the outset of his manual, we cannot charge him with any lack of consistency in its development. In accordance with his opinion that punctuation "is concerned not with grammatical but with rhetorical classification," he thruout frankly limits himself to the rhetorical aspect of his subject. Even of what he calls "etymological pointing" he says (p. 139), "The present chapter is not a compendium of rules. Its purpose is only to point out the more usual customs, with the rhetorical considerations applicable to whatsoever set of styles one may happen to follow." Perhaps we should merely be grateful for what is by far the most satisfactory treatment of one important side of punctuation; but one cannot but regret, at least from the standpoint of the searcher for a usable textbook, that Dr. Summey's philosophy did not permit him to provide his brilliant exposition of the rhetoric of punctuation with the solid if less exciting substructure of its grammar and orthography.

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A GUIDE TO RUSSIAN LITERATURE. By Moissaye J. Olgin. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920. 8vo., xiv+323 pages.

The book under review, casually opened, suggests the textbook or biographical dictionary. It contains between its covers notes on about fifty writers, arranged in three chronological groups, each preceded by a general survey. The temporal limits of the book are 1820-1917. Although Russian literature begins with Lemonosov (1711-1765), who has aptly been called the Peter the Great of Russian letters, this Guide to Russian Literature begins with the much later Pushkin. The reason, though not stated by the author, is that Russian literature, as far as it is of interest to the western world, starts with this great poet. Yet, within the bounds which the author has thus set himself there are, however, very flagrant omissions. He has not limited himself to writers of *belles lettres*, but has included even those who have written on social, economical, and political questions. His omission, therefore, of political writers, such as Herzen (1812-1879), who has justly been called the Russian Voltaire, Bakunin (1814-1876), the founder of modern anarchism, and of Kropotkin, the theoretician of the anarchist movement, cannot be excused. Nikolai Chernyshevky (1828-